

## Message Text

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ORIGIN ACDA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 FEA-01 ERDA-07  
AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08  
FPC-01 H-02 INR-07 INT-05 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05  
OMB-01 PM-04 USIA-15 OES-06 SP-02 SS-15 STR-04  
TRSE-00 PA-02 PRS-01 /141 R

DRAFTED BY ACDA/NTB/WT:RMIKULAK  
APPROVED BY ACDA/NTB:TDAVIES  
NSC-JMARCUM  
OSD-GHARLOW  
ERDA-JPHILLIPS  
PM/DCA-HPHELPS  
EUR/SOV-JGLASSMAN  
S/S-MR. REDDY

-----260713Z 118786 /21

R 252325Z APR 77  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY BONN  
USMISSION GENEVA

UNCLAS STATE 093294

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PARM, TECH, UR

SUBJECT: SOVIET PLAN FOR NUCLEAR EXCAVATION

1. ON APRIL 20, 1977, LOS ANGELES TIMES CARRIED STORY  
(BY ROBERT C. TOTH WITH MOSCOW DATELINE) ENTITLED  
"KREMLIN ABANDONS ITS PLAN TO DIG URAL CANAL WITH  
NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS." ARTICLE APPARENTLY BASED ON  
INTERVIEW WITH PROJECT DIRECTOR. (WE UNDERSTAND SIMILAR  
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STORY WAS PRINTED IN APRIL 21 EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
HERALD-TRIBUNE.)

2. EXCERPT FROM ARTICLE FOLLOWS: SOVIET ENGINEERS  
HAVE DECIDED NOT TO USE ATOMIC EXPLOSIVES TO DIG A CANAL  
THAT WOULD DIVERT PART OF A NORTH-FLOWING RIVER SOUTH  
INTO THE WATER-SHORT VOLGA BASIN, ACCORDING TO THE

PROJECT DIRECTOR.

SIX YEARS AGO THE RUSSIANS EXPLODED THREE NUCLEAR DEVICES IN AN UNDERGROUND TEST OF THE TECHNIQUE. THE BLASTS WERE SET OFF ALONG THE PROJECTED 70-MILE-LONG CANAL ROUTE, RUNNING FROM THE PECHORA RIVER TO THE KOLVA RIVER, THROUGH A ROCKY SPUR IN THE URAL MOUNTAINS.

THE SOVIET PRESS HAS CLAIMED THE TEST PROVED THE FEASIBILITY OF USING NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES IN AT LEAST THIS PART OF A GRADIOSE SCHEME TO TAKE SURPLUS WATER FROM NORTHERN RIVERS IN EUROPE AND SIBERIA TO THE THIRSTY SOUTH OF BOTH REGIONS.

ONE ARTICLE SAID THE 40-MILE SECTION OF THE CANAL PASSING THROUGH ROCKY TERRAIN WOULD BE EXCAVATED WITH 250 NUCLEAR CHARGES, SOME AS BIG AS THREE MEGATONS (3 MILLION TONS OF TNT EQUIVALENT). USING NUCLEAR INSTEAD OF CONVENTIONAL EXPLOSIVES WOULD CUT COSTS TWO-THIRDS, IT CLAIMED, AND REDUCE CONSTRUCTION TIME "SUBSTANTIALLY."

BUT IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, PROJECT DIRECTOR GURGEN SARUKHANOV OF THE MINISTRY OF ENERGY SAID THE CANAL HAS BEEN REROUTED IN THE FINAL PLAN TO PASS THROUGH SANDY SOIL ONLY, AND ITS LENGTH SHORTENED TO ONLY 12 MILES. NUCLEAR BLASTS WILL NOT BE NEEDED TO DIG IT, HE SAID.

ECOLOGISTS MAY HAVE INFLUENCED THE REROUTING. THEIR CONCERNS HAVE BEEN THE LARGEST SINGLE OBSTACLE TO THE UNCLASSIFIED

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DIVERSION SCHEME, AND EVEN IF THE 1971 NUCLEAR TEST HAD NO HARMFUL EFFECTS, ENGINEERS MAY HAVE CHANGED THEIR PLANS TO AVOID ADDING RADIATION TO AN ALREADY FORMIDABLE LIST OF ENVIRONMENTAL FEARS.  
VANCE

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Type:** TE  
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**Review Markings:**  
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